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ABSTRACT

The guide is designed to give parents basic information about the French second language (FSL) program of Alberta (Canada) elementary and secondary schools, and to answer commonly-asked questions. Sections address these topics: the benefits of second language learning; choosing French as a second language; how the FSL program is structured; how much French can be learned in FSL; assurance of program quality; the parent's role in supporting the child in FSL; and common questions about the age at which a child should begin language study, considerations for the child who already knows some FSL, the difference between FSL and French immersion, starting a new program, changing schools, teacher qualifications, university admission requirements, earning high school credits with French learned through grade 9, and FSL courses available in high school. (MSE)

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French as a Second Language (FSL) Program

ED 428 550

A Guide for Parents

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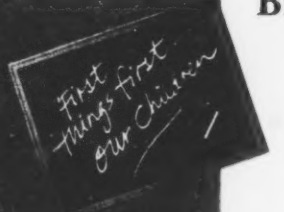

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French as a Second Language (FSL) Program

A Guide for Parents

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Message from the

Minister of Education

Alberta Education encourages opportunities for all Alberta students to learn French by making available programs and services for French as a second language (FSL). Approximately 31 per cent of Canadians and 120 million people worldwide are able to speak and use French in their daily lives. French also is a common language used in business, trade and international affairs.

French as a Second Language (FSL) Program: A Guide for Parents will help you understand the Alberta FSL program and the opportunities it offers your child. You will find this booklet particularly useful if you are:

- considering FSL for a young child,
- helping an older child choose courses, or
- looking for ways to support your child in the FSL program.

Alberta's FSL program will help your child learn to communicate in French in a variety of school, travel, leisure and job-related contexts.

I would like to thank the parents, students and teachers who contributed to the development of this booklet.

Gary G. Mar, Q.C.
Minister of Education

What are the benefits of learning a second language?

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Students may not be fully aware of the value of learning a second language, but more and more parents are recognizing that knowing a second language will give their children many advantages in the future. Here are three good reasons for your child to learn a second language:

- to prepare for the world of work,
- to enhance personal and cultural experiences, and
- to improve overall communicative abilities.

A second language prepares students for the world of work.

In the late 1990s, a common reason for learning a second language is preparation for the workforce. Whether it is a part-time job or a long-term career, your child's second language skills will provide a competitive edge and/or simply make work easier and more rewarding.

The experience of learning a second language also develops and enhances important job-related skills. Prospective employers are recognizing that people who have second language skills also bring other skills to the workplace. For example, in a second language class students learn to:

- listen and think critically,
- adapt to a variety of situations,
- seek and process information, and
- understand and co-operate with others.

Employees with second language skills are in demand in Alberta because:

- Increasing global trade requires employees to understand and relate to customers from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- One of Alberta's fastest-growing industries is international tourism and hospitality, which requires staff who speak the languages of the visitors they are welcoming.

Employees and business people who serve local customers frequently need to know several languages besides English.

A second language is also an asset in fields such as telecommunications, education, medicine, international affairs and, increasingly, in technical fields such as the computer software industry.

A second language enhances personal and cultural experiences.

People who speak and understand a second language possess an additional means of considering and experiencing their surroundings. Second language skills can be a passport to the world and the key to a richer personal and cultural life. For example, those who speak and understand more than one language often find it easier to:

- benefit fully from travel and interactions with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds,
- understand, respect and develop relationships with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and
- enjoy a wide variety of literature, music, theatre, art, sports and movies.

A second language helps to develop overall communicative abilities.

Students with second language skills are likely to improve their communication skills in English, and develop a larger English vocabulary and a better understanding of the structure and grammatical rules of the English language. Also, learning a second language provides a solid foundation for learning other languages in the future.

Why French?

French is a natural choice for many parents and students because it is widely used and accessible throughout the country. It is one of Canada's two official languages and is spoken by approximately 31 per cent of Canadians.

French is also widely used internationally. It is spoken by about 120 million people worldwide and is commonly used in business, trade and international affairs. It is an official language of the European Economic Community, the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee.

Today, more than two million Canadian school children are studying French as a second language. The current generation of young Canadians is the most bilingual in our nation's history. Nearly 16 per cent of Canadian young people outside of Quebec aged 15 to 19 were bilingual in English and French by the time of the 1996 census. Approximately 38 per cent of the population in Quebec is bilingual according to the 1996 census.

The strong presence of French throughout Canada[1] provides teachers and students with access to a wide range of age-appropriate teaching materials and resources, ranging from reference and comic books to French media and entertainment.

What is the FSL program and how does it work?

Alberta's French as a second language program (sometimes also called core or basic French) provides your child with an opportunity to learn the French language as a subject in the regular English language school. In FSL, students study French to learn to communicate in a variety of school, leisure and job-related situations. The recommended amount of FSL instruction time is 30 to 40 minutes per day.

FSL is an optional program that can begin at a variety of grade levels. Most school boards offer students an opportunity to begin the FSL program in either grade 4, 7 or 10. A few boards offer FSL as early as kindergarten or grade 1. Several school boards and private school operators have chosen, in consultation with their communities, to require all students to take FSL at certain grade levels (most typically grades 4 through 6 or grades 7 through 9).

[1] While most Canadian Francophones live in the province of Quebec, 970,000 Francophones live outside of Quebec. Of those, 53,375 live in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 1996 census).

The goals of the FSL program include enabling students to:

- communicate in French (listen, speak, read and write),
- develop an awareness of Francophone cultures and a general understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity,
- understand and use the French language system (sounds, symbols, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure), and
- develop second language learning strategies that can be transferred to other life situations and used to acquire other languages or to enhance first language skills.

Multi-Dimensional Curriculum

The current FSL curriculum is best described as multi-dimensional. It is made up of four interrelated components: experience/communication, culture, language and general language education. Each component develops a different aspect of language, but all of the components work together.

In the **experience/communication** component, students learn to communicate by participating in thematic projects suited to their interests, maturity and life experiences. Students engage in communicative tasks and are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas orally and in writing and to understand the thoughts and ideas of others.

In the **culture** component, students learn about the way of life of Canadian and international Francophone cultures (their ideas, behaviours, beliefs, values, institutions), and develop an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Students learn about Francophone cultures through a variety of activities, including the use of videos, television and magazines; writing to pen-pals; and taking part in exchanges with their Francophone peers in other provinces and countries.

In the **language** component, students learn specific aspects of the French language needed for successful communication. The goal is not memorization and recitation, but rather understanding and appropriate use of sounds, intonation, vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure in order to communicate effectively.

In the **general language education** component, students develop language learning strategies that help them become successful language learners. Students learn to take risks in communicating, to work co-operatively and to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning.

In a multi-dimensional curriculum, students will participate in some of the following activities:

- creating a family tree in French,
- role-playing the purchase of consumer goods in French,
- listening to a news story in French and discussing it,
- writing a business letter in French requesting information from a government department,
- discussing a special event in French with a friend,
- watching a movie with a French soundtrack and then writing a film review in French,
- preparing a report on future careers and professions in French, and
- presenting an oral report in French on a student trip or exchange.

How much French will my child learn in FSL?

Many factors will influence your child's success in FSL. Instruction, curriculum and learning materials play an important part. The amount of time your child spends learning French, along with the attitude and motivation s/he brings to the FSL classroom, will also influence the level of French proficiency your child achieves. Another factor is the number of opportunities your child has to experience French outside the classroom and to use it in a variety of real-life situations (as well as his or her willingness to take advantage of such opportunities).

Alberta Education encourages schools offering the FSL program to provide the following minimum number of hours of instruction per year:

- 90 hours (approximately 30 minutes daily) in elementary grades,
- 75 hours (approximately 25 minutes daily) in junior high, and

- 125 hours (approximately 40 minutes daily) in high school.

Although time allotments for FSL are not mandatory, Alberta Education recommends an average of at least 30 to 40 minutes of instruction per day so that students will receive sufficient exposure to the language and enough time for interaction in French.

Levels of communicative language growth

The Program of Studies describes French language proficiency in FSL using three broad levels of communicative language growth or language proficiency: the **Beginning**, **Intermediate** and **Advanced** levels. Each of these levels is further divided into three sub-levels: **Beginning** 1, 2, 3; **Intermediate** 4, 5, 6; and **Advanced** 7, 8, 9. Each sub-level has a set of specific learner expectations or skills based on each of the goals of the FSL program.

Since students begin their FSL studies at various ages, a **Beginning** level student may be in elementary, junior or senior high school, and an **Intermediate** level student may be in junior or senior high school. Most **Advanced** level students are in senior high school.

This system of French language knowledge and skills is much like the system your child's swimming instructor uses to assess progress in water safety, skills and endurance. As each new set of swimming skills is achieved, your child completes a swimming level (for example, *Yellow* or the new *AquaQuest 1/2*) and then moves on to the next level (*Orange* or *AquaQuest 3*, then *Red* or *AquaQuest 4*) and so on.

Students may take one or more years to reach a particular sub-level of communicative growth in French depending on their own ability, the amount of time given to FSL in the school and the many other factors already mentioned. Students move through each sub-level by building on what they have learned at the previous level. They learn increasingly complex and abstract communicative skills as they progress.

What you can expect your child to achieve at each level

The following section provides a detailed description of each of the **Beginning**, **Intermediate** and **Advanced** levels of the FSL program.

Students completing the **Beginning** level of French language proficiency (depending on their age or starting grade and life experience) will be able to:

- engage in language experiences dealing with these and other fields that relate to their needs and interests:

BEGINNING 1	BEGINNING 2	BEGINNING 3
School People around us Weather Animals Holidays and celebrations	Community Clothing Exercise Food Housing	Activities Vacations Fine arts Trades and professions Hygiene and safety

- understand and communicate simple oral and written messages of two or three sentences about familiar topics (for example, the weather, school or safety),
- answer commonly asked questions (for example, "How old are you?", "Where are you going?"),
- recognize the presence of French-speaking people in the community, and
- follow directions for simple tasks.

Students who have achieved the **Intermediate** level will be able to:

- engage in language experiences dealing with these and other fields that relate to their needs and interests:

INTERMEDIATE 4	INTERMEDIATE 5	INTERMEDIATE 6
Health and exercise Holidays and celebrations Clubs and associations Shopping Senses and feelings	Close friends Fashion Social life Outdoor activities Advertising	World of work Trips, excursions or student exchanges Money Role of the media Conservation and the environment

- carry on simple conversations on everyday subjects (for example, ordering a pizza over the phone, interviewing someone about outdoor activities),
- understand the main ideas in French language printed materials on familiar subjects (for example, short stories, personal letters),
- write short messages and letters (for example, an article about a trip taken, a short résumé and part-time job application letter),

- research and identify similarities and differences between French cultures and their own, and
- use French reference books independently to correct their own errors and assess whether they are succeeding in meeting the program's expectations.

Since students entering the FSL program in high school bring greater maturity and more experience to their learning, they may be able to achieve the **Intermediate** level of proficiency after four French courses (French 13, 10, 20 and 30). French 30 is the current high school leaving course for the FSL program.

After nine or more years of studying FSL, students may be able to communicate at the **Advanced** level. Students at the **Advanced** level of French language proficiency will be able to:

- engage in language experiences dealing with these and other fields that relate to their needs and interests:

ADVANCED 7	ADVANCED 8	ADVANCED 9
Challenges for my future Health and leisure activities The francophone world Legends and myths The sciences – Technology	Communications The future of the world The arts/Plays Adolescents and the law Characters and personalities	Dealing with government Humour Becoming independent Novels Social trends and issues

- take part in discussions of concrete topics and use vocabulary and intonation to understand and communicate fine shades of meaning,
- understand the meaning of the main points and supporting details in a variety of written French texts,
- understand and use the grammatical elements necessary for oral and written communication in the past, present and/or future tenses,
- understand the overall development of ideas (in French novels, films and discussions),
- understand and explain cultural elements, such as beliefs and values, and
- use knowledge of learning strategies to perfect communication skills.

Generally, students who achieve the **Advanced** level:

- have experienced a high-quality, continuous program from the elementary grades through high school,
- have had additional exposure to French outside of school,
- are highly motivated, and
- have completed French 31a, 31b and 31c.

Language learning is a lifelong experience

When considering FSL for your young child or helping an older child choose courses, remember that learning a second language is like learning a first language. It takes time and practice. A long-term commitment to FSL will produce the best results!

How can I be sure the FSL program at our school is a quality program?

Alberta Education develops the FSL curriculum, recommends appropriate learning resources and assists in the pre-service and in-service training of teachers. However, because FSL is an optional program, different schools and different school boards may choose to deliver the program in different ways. To find out about the FSL program at your child's school or a school you may be considering for the future, talk to the principal, FSL teacher(s) and/or staff at your school board offices. If your schedule permits, ask to visit an FSL classroom.

Use this checklist as a general guide:

- The school board and school are committed to offering a quality FSL program.
- Parents of children in the FSL program express satisfaction with the program.
- The FSL program is offered for at least 30 to 40 minutes per day and is available over a minimum of six consecutive years in the school district so that students may achieve at least the **Intermediate** level of proficiency.
- Teachers use French as the language of instruction in classroom conversation and to manage classroom activities.

- Students seem motivated and involved, display a positive attitude toward learning French and are achieving at an appropriate level of communicative growth (**Beginning**, **Intermediate** or **Advanced**).
- A variety of French language materials and references are available in the classroom and school library.
- Activities include opportunities for students to experience and use French outside of the classroom and with Francophones.

Through active participation in your school council, you can encourage and support a quality FSL program. You can work with other parents and your school's principal and teachers so that students have adequate French resources and opportunities to use and experience French outside of the classroom.

What can I do to help and support my child?

Your support and encouragement are key to your child's motivation and positive attitude toward learning French. Even if you do not speak French, you can help by taking an interest in your child's progress in French and encouraging activities that enhance language learning. You can even ask your child to teach you what is being learned in school.

To make optimal progress, your child needs to experience French outside of school as well as in the classroom. Providing opportunities and encouraging your child to use French at home and in real-life situations in the community will enhance learning and lead to a higher level of achievement.

You can support and encourage your child in a number of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Communicate with your child's FSL teacher. Discuss the program and find out more about what you and your child should expect of the French language learning experience. Attend parent-teacher-student interviews. Call the teacher if you have questions or concerns.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about his or her FSL learning experiences and progress.

- Create opportunities for your child to practise language skills. Children transfer the skills they learn in their first language to their learning of French.

- Keep a French-English dictionary on the family bookshelf and encourage your child to use it! The FSL teacher can recommend an edition suitable for your child's level of French and may suggest other helpful resources as well.

- Bring French into your home easily and inexpensively. Borrow French language books (including comic books) from the library. Subscribe to a French magazine. These are available for all ages and suit many interests, ranging from nature and science to fashion. Tune in to French television programs your children might enjoy, such as cartoons, hockey games, quiz shows and news broadcasts. Videos, board games, computer software and the Internet can also provide a variety of French language experiences.

- As your child's skills develop, local French cultural opportunities, such as plays, concerts and festivals, can be fun for the whole family. They provide an opportunity for your child to experience French in a social setting. For an older child, if the family budget permits, look into student exchanges and educational tours to French-speaking communities in Canada and abroad.

- Contact Canadian Parents for French (CPF), a volunteer association that actively supports and promotes French second language programs and opportunities in Alberta and across Canada. CPF has information about resources and activities for children who are learning French and for their families (see page 17 for contact information).

- Alberta Education's publication, *Yes, You Can Help! A Guide for French Immersion Parents*, provides a wealth of ideas and resources that also will be useful to FSL parents. Order this publication from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre (see page 17 for ordering information).

- For more ideas, talk to your child's FSL teacher.

Other questions parents often ask

1. ***At what age should my child begin learning French as a second language?***

   There is no magic age. Students of all ages can learn a second language. Many studies suggest, however, that a second language is most easily learned at a young age. As a general rule, the more time spent in FSL, and the greater the level of interest and motivation, the more proficient your child will become.

2. ***What if my child already knows a lot of French? Will s/he be bored in the FSL class?***

   In the FSL program, students work at their own level. Teachers *should* challenge **all** students to develop their communication skills and to move ahead as quickly as they can. You (or your child if s/he is old enough) should discuss proper placement with the school principal, guidance counsellor or FSL teacher. If your child's needs can not be met through available FSL courses, consider alternatives to classroom French. Depending on your child's age, interest and French language proficiency, the options may include distance learning courses, French immersion, special projects, work experience or even a university course in French.

3. ***What is the difference between FSL and French immersion?***

   In FSL, students study French as a subject, usually for 30 to 40 minutes a day. For the rest of their school day, English is used as the language of instruction. In the French immersion program, French is used as the language of instruction for a significant part of each school day (usually from 75% to 100% in the early grades and from 25% to 80% in secondary school) and several or all subjects are taught in French, except English language arts.

   FSL can begin anywhere from kindergarten or grade 1 to grade 10, depending on the school board or school. French immersion usually begins in kindergarten or grade 1 (early immersion) or in grade 7 (late immersion).

FSL students develop a basic knowledge of French. The depth of their knowledge will vary according to the length and intensity of the program and a variety of other factors identified on page 6. Research shows that by the end of grade 12, the majority of French immersion students develop functional fluency in French while achieving as well as English program students in all other subject areas, including English language arts. As with FSL, the development of their French language skills is directly related to how much they have been exposed to French and the many other factors that influence learning.

Detailed information on French immersion is available in the book *Yes, You Can Help! A Guide for French Immersion Parents* (see page 17 for ordering information). Further information about both FSL and French immersion can be obtained from Canadian Parents for French or from the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education (see page 17 for contact information).

4. ***What can I do if an FSL program is not offered at my child's school or I would like to see it offered at a certain grade level?***

In Alberta schools, second languages are optional programs. School boards and private school operators consult with students, parents and community members to determine which optional programs will best address student needs and interests. Therefore, you should make your wishes known to those who make decisions about school programs: your school principal, members of your school council and your school trustees. You may also wish to inquire whether FSL is offered in other district schools. Alternatively, you may wish to contact the Alberta Distance Learning Centre to explore FSL distance learning opportunities for a child in junior or senior high school (see page 17 for contact information).

5. ***What happens if my child changes schools after beginning FSL?***

Ask the FSL teacher to provide a program outline and information on your child's level of French language proficiency. This information will help the FSL teacher at the new school to meet your child's needs.

If you can, look for an FSL program that most resembles the one your child is leaving. Not all schools (or school boards) offer FSL at the same grade

levels. Consult the school principal in your new school or the new school board's office staff for information and advice.

6. ***Do all FSL teachers in Alberta have adequate knowledge of the French language?***

   Alberta Education recommends that French as a second language teachers possess at least an **Advanced** level of language proficiency in French. In recent years, many FSL teachers have taken advantage of opportunities to improve their French language skills.

7. ***Does my child need French courses in order to attend university?***

   In Alberta universities, credits in French as a second language (French 30) may be presented for admission to university. However, French is not required for admission to any program except those offered in French, such as programs at the University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean. In some faculties, such as the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, students must complete at least one course in a language other than English in order to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

   Most Canadian post-secondary institutions that require a language other than English for admission to an undergraduate program will accept credit in French 30. Previous study of French as a second language is a great help to students who are studying any second language at the post-secondary level.

   Students should communicate directly with the university of interest to them to determine admission requirements.

8. ***Can my child use the French s/he has learned by the end of grade 9 to earn high school credits?***

   Yes. Students who have achieved the **Intermediate** level 6 of the FSL program (or higher) may challenge French 10, 20 and 30 when they enter senior high school. To challenge a course successfully, the student must demonstrate knowledge and skills at the level expected for completion of the course being challenged. Challenge assessments, which are developed by the school board, may include oral and written examinations, samples of student work, projects,

interviews or other activities that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and attitudes. For each successfully challenged course, students earn five credits and receive a final mark.

For more information, contact your local senior high school.

9. ***What are the different FSL courses in senior high school?***

Students entering the FSL program in high school are placed in a course that builds on the knowledge and skills they already have acquired. The courses include French 13 and 10 (**Beginning** level courses), French 20 and 30 (**Intermediate** level courses) and French 31a, 31b, 31c (**Advanced** level courses).

French 13 is a **Beginning** level course designed to help students with little or no previous study of French to achieve a level of proficiency that will allow them to enter the French 10, 20, 30 sequence. Many Alberta students will have achieved at least **Beginning** level 2 proficiency before high school and will enter French 10. Those who have achieved **Beginning** level 3 proficiency are usually placed in French 20.

Students successfully completing French 30 will have achieved an **Intermediate** level of proficiency. Students who have achieved **Intermediate** level 6 may enter the French 31a, 31b, 31c sequence to work toward **Advanced** level proficiency.

For more information

Alberta Education Contacts:

- Language Services Branch
  11160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, AB, T5K 0L2
  Telephone: (780) 427-2940; Fax: (780) 422-1947
  (Call toll-free from outside Edmonton by dialling 310-0000 first and then the number.)

- Learning Resources Distributing Centre
  12360 - 142 Street, Edmonton, AB, T5L 4X9
  Telephone: (780) 427-5775; Fax: (780) 422-9750
  Internet: <http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca/lrdc>

- Alberta Distance Learning Centre
  Box 4000, Barrhead, AB, T7N 1P4
  Telephone: (780) 674-5333 (Call toll-free in Alberta by dialling 310-000 first and then the number.)

- FSL site on the Internet
  <http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca/FSL>

Alberta Education Publications:

- The *Curriculum Handbook for Parents* Series
  The booklets in this series describe the knowledge, attitudes and skills students are expected to demonstrate in each subject area by the end of each grade. There is a booklet for each of grades 1 through 9, and there are both public and separate school versions.

  The booklets are available through your local school or from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre.

- *Yes, You Can Help! A Guide for French Immersion Parents* is available from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre.

Other Contacts:

- Canadian Parents for French — Alberta Branch
  Box 30036, Chinook Postal Outlet
  Calgary, AB, T2H 2V8
  Telephone: (403) 262-5187; Fax: (403) 265-0194
  e-mail: <cpfalta@cadvision.com>;
  Internet: <http://www.educ.ucalgary.ca>

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